



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND & PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF REHABILITATION SERVICES
SERVICES FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED
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Business Enterprises Program Fact Sheet

The Business Enterprises Program (BEP) is a Federal/State program, which establishes entrepreneurial opportunities for individuals who are legally blind primarily through initiating food service business throughout Rhode Island. Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI), as the State Licensing Agency (SLA), finds appropriate potentially lucrative vending facility locations, builds the facility, installs the need equipment, purchases the initial stock and even provides the initial operating cash. The vendor is trained in all aspects of managing a facility and is licensed by the State. Vendors purchase and sell items at a markup in accordance with the facility agreement. The vendor keeps all proceeds except for a small fee, which the State collects (currently 1.5% of gross profit) mostly to maintain equipment and provide a safety net for program operation.

Who Is Eligible?

Legally blind individuals enrolled in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) are eligible for entry to the BEP training program. These individuals must be “work ready”. This means that they must be able to travel independently, have mathematical and business skills, be able to work with the public, and have pride in their personal appearance.

Once referred from the Vocational Rehabilitation Unit, they are interviewed by the BEP Chief Supervisor to ensure their appropriateness for the program. Upon acceptance, they will be scheduled for a five-day onsite evaluation. This allows the potential trainee an opportunity to try out the job prior to committing to a sixteen-week training period.

What Training?

Upon acceptance to the BEP, the potential vendor enters a sixteen-week training curriculum. Five weeks of “In House” training which covers the Randolph Sheppard Act which the BEP is based upon, the RI BEP State law and policy, Health Department rules and regulations, customer relations, personal hygiene, operating and maintaining equipment, cooking skills, cleaning and sanitizing, bookkeeping and accounting practices, and merchandising.

Five weeks of supervised work experience at various facilities are interspersed with classroom learning so that skills are transferred to facility operation.

A six-week course on food safety is also required prior to completion of the program.

Where Will I Work?

Upon graduation from the training program, the graduate is able to bid on any vending facility which becomes available. Once in a Facility, the graduate vendor takes over the operation of the facility. Graduate vendors must complete a six-month probationary period prior to being licensed as a BEP vendor by the state.

As more lucrative facilities become available, the vendor can bid for those facilities based on seniority and performance.

Currently, the trade name COFFEE PLUS is used to market the program and its products. There are now 23 locations within Rhode Island. Last year, gross sales approached \$1.7 million.

Why Be A Vendor?

Entering the BEP program allows a legally blind individual the opportunity to own their own business without the massive expense or the risk of starting a business of their own. The SLA takes on the capital risk and ensures success in 3 days. First, each facility has a Supervisor assigned to it to help the vendor build the business. Second, licensed vendors can bid up into more lucrative facilities as their seniority increases. Third, law guarantees the vendors the minimum wage.

In 2002, the Rhode Island BEP vendors earned individual incomes ranging from \$12,300 to almost \$50,000.

The SLA's primary goals are to assist vendors to make more money and to open more lucrative facilities. The vendors and the SLA work as a team to make BEP the best it can be.

Vending Facility Locations

- ☐ Pawtucket City Hall, 137 Roosevelt Avenue, Pawtucket, RI 02860
- ☐ Providence City Hall, 25 Dorrance Street, Providence, RI 02903
- ☐ Aime Forand Building, 600 New London Avenue, Cranston, RI 02920
- ☐ Cannon Building, 3 Capitol Hill, Providence, RI 02903
- ☐ Woonsocket Post Office, 127 Social Street, Woonsocket, RI 02895
- ☐ Kent County Courthouse, 222 Quaker Lane, West Warwick, RI 02893
- ☐ Garrahy Complex, One Dorrance Plaza, Providence, RI 02903
- ☐ Federal Center, Box 17, 380 Westminster Street, Providence, RI 02903
- ☐ Adjudication, 345 Harris Avenue, Providence, RI 02909
- ☐ Licht Building, 250 Benefit Street, Providence, RI 02903
- ☐ Department of Transportation, 2 Capitol Hill, Providence, RI 02903
- ☐ Department of Children, Youth & Families, 101 Friendship Street, Providence, RI 02908
- ☐ Department of Administration, One Capitol Hill, Providence, RI 02908
- ☐ Vocational Rehabilitation, 40 Fountain Street, Providence, RI 02903
- ☐ Pawtucket Registry, 2886 Main Street, Pawtucket, RI 02860
- ☐ Naval Undersea Warfare Center, 1176 Howell Street, 1320, Newport, RI 02841-1708
- ☐ Shepard Building, 80 Washington Street, Providence, RI 02890003
- ☐ Department of Environmental Management, 235 Promenade Street, Providence, RI 02908
- ☐ RI Army National Guard, 645 New London Avenue, 1st Floor, Cranston, RI 0202-
- ☐ Naval Undersea Warfare Center, 1176 Howell Street, 1351, Newport, RI 02841-1708
- ☐ Center General Complex, Dept. of Labor and Training, 1511 Pontiac Avenue, Cranston, RI 02920
- ☐ Providence Regional Center, 206 Elmwood Avenue, Providence, RI 02907
- ☐ Naval Ambulatory Care Center, 43 McIntyre Road, Bldg. 43, Newport, RI 02841-1002

